

31st January 2018

Dear Parents and Carers

Post Ofsted Update 1

Moving forward in light of the recently published Ofsted Report this is the first in a series of regular updates to keep you informed of the school's strategy and progress in ensuring our previous 'Good' rating is reinstated in two years' time when Ofsted are due to return.

In the report Inspectors commented that Leaders and Governors know the school well and this was very encouraging. As a result of knowing the school well we had already started to make the changes needed prior to their inspection in December 2017, but we know there is more to be done as we strive for excellence for all. It is also true that some of the changes take time to work through and show impact but we can see improvement in expected results for the current Year 11 and Year 10.

What was done before the 2017 Inspection:

a) Curriculum

- The curriculum was changed in 2015/16 so that virtually all students now do the qualifying subjects for Progress 8 apart from a small number on a level 1 work skills pathway. In 2016 only 70% had this combination of subjects which expects everyone to have Maths, English, Science and either a Humanity, a Language or Computing as well as three other approved subjects. In 2017 only 64% had this full combination but in 2018 it is 91% and in 2019 it will be 94%. This change inevitably restricts choice for subjects at Options time but meets Government requirements for a broad and balanced curriculum and was necessary if our Progress 8 score and so our place in league tables is to improve.
- We have also changed the expectation regarding Modern Languages to allow students to compete with their peers up and down the country. There is now an expectation that more and more students will take a language so that they achieve the Ebacc of English, Maths, 2 Sciences, a Humanity and a Modern Foreign Language. In 2017 our Ebacc entry was only 13 % but in 2018 it will be 35% and in 2019 42% which shows real aspiration for our students.
- From the Autumn of 2018, students in current Year 8 onwards will follow a three year GCSE programme which will allow them to cover all the content in a less frantic way, finish in time to have thorough revision of the course and allow for the inclusion of enrichment activities such as the visit to Durham Castle and Cathedral for the Normans element of the History course.
- Over the past three years we introduced more vocational courses into Post 16 as well as having to reduce the number of A levels which had traditionally not recruited well. It is ironic that 2017 saw our best Post 16 results for several years with a positive value added score for those students who took exams in that year – at a time when we reluctantly had to make a decision to consult on the future of the Sixth Form as a result of Government funding.

b) Teaching & Learning

- In 2017 we launched a new Teaching & Learning Policy with an emphasis on challenge, questioning, literacy and assessment & feedback. It is pleasing that the report recognised that impact had been made particularly with regard to oracy, questioning and feedback (assessment and feedback was a performance management objective for all staff as a school priority). We now need to put greater effort into appropriate challenge for all and ensuring that best practice is consistent across the school.
- In 2016 the Cluster model for subjects outside of English, Maths and Science was broken up to provide more specific subject leadership. We have already seen the positive impact this has had especially in subjects such as History where results rose rapidly in 2017, in Drama and Dance which had excellent results in 2017 and Modern Languages which was a high performing subject in 2017.
- There is a very active Teaching & Learning group of staff in school who work with Mr Morton especially on CPD and INSET for staff and in leading the sharing of good practice
- For the past year we have worked very closely with external consultants, especially in the core subjects, to develop teaching and learning and to build on good practice with the new more demanding GCSE content.
- Each Faculty has a programme of monitoring and quality assuring the teaching and learning taking place and the Senior Leadership team also has a regular programme of quality assurance. During the inspection SLT paired up with inspectors for almost all the lesson observations and had to provide the feedback to teachers first. Inspectors were more than satisfied with SLT's ability to judge the quality of teaching and learning taking place.

c) Behaviour and attendance

- In Spring 2017 we completely revised our attendance protocols so that there were clear triggers for appropriate interventions when a student was in danger of falling below the 96% target or the 90% persistent absence threshold. This has had real impact, particularly on the attendance of disadvantaged students which was worse than the national average for this group in 2015 and 2016 but is now more in line. There is still more to do in this area.
- After considerable review and discussion and with a new Assistant Head in place, we launched a revised Behaviour for Learning Policy in September 2017 which has clear principles of rewards, students accepting responsibility for their behaviours, restorative conversations, and staged triggers for sanctions. Inspectors were happy with the policy and the task we now have is to ensure it is applied consistently and confidently.
- In September 2017 we opened our new Behaviour Support Unit called 'Step Up' which provides a facility for those struggling with behaviour and classroom expectations to be withdrawn for up to half a term to work intensively on behaviour matters while continuing to be taught the core subjects in a small group
- In September 2017 we secured a service level agreement for a number of places on the Mckee Centre's new assessment programme for those who we believe should have an EHCP but do not yet have one for whatever reason. There are a considerable number of students who should be supported through an EHCP but are coming into school without one and if we can speed up the process of the EHCP we can access more external help for these students who sometimes have complex learning needs.

- We now have a dedicated exclusion room as an alternative to fixed term exclusion where students are out of circulation and isolated from their peers from 9am till 4pm
- Unfortunately it is sometimes necessary to permanently exclude a student whose behaviour is not changing, which is causing a persistent disturbance or for a one off serious offence. This is not something to take lightly but it will be done and so far this academic year there have been 6 permanent exclusions upheld by the Governors.

We need to continue with the actions outlined above as they are having a positive impact on student outcomes, the quality of teaching, the progress of the disadvantaged, behaviour and attendance. We have to accept that these were not embedded sufficiently at the time of the Inspection and that we do not yet have a set of published results for students who have gone through this more challenging curriculum.

Inspectors gave us 7 areas to focus on in order to improve further.

- The Leadership Team are in the process of revising the School Improvement Plan so that it has the more precise timelines Ofsted requested which will allow for the impact of actions to be measured more effectively. This plan will go to Governors for approval in late February and we will establish a new Governors' Committee to monitor the effectiveness of this plan with the Local Authority on at least a termly basis.
- Inspectors asked us to be more effective in the use of catch up funding for literacy and numeracy in Year 7. This equates to £12,000 currently and we have already set in place a more focussed programme of intervention for this cohort who came to us from primary school with scores of less than 98 in reading and maths. It is worth pointing out that while the plans were not precise enough for the inspectors, we can demonstrate the progress made by catch up students who joined us in September.
- Inspectors asked us to ensure that all staff have the skills and confidence to apply the new behaviour policy effectively. Any new policy takes time to embed but we will do this through more staff training, individual work with staff and staff sharing strategies to be more effective. We were very aware that it is primarily a minority of students in Year 8 and 9 who are struggling to maintain the high standards we expect and will continue to challenge this through the policy and through meetings with parents and carers. If necessary we will also use the route of managed moves or exclusion as no student has the right to disrupt the learning of others. I also recognise that we need to renew efforts in terms of rewards and praise.
- Students cannot learn if they are not in school and there is a proven link between attendance and successful outcomes. When the inspectors came we could demonstrate that overall school attendance was in line with national average and that the attendance of disadvantaged students was better than it had been the year before. This is very much a case of continuing with the policies we have – of responding to triggers, not authorising holidays in term time, home visits and if necessary sending out warning notices and penalty notices.

- Without losing the focus on assessment, feedback, questioning and oracy in lessons we will have a renewed focus on challenge for all (differentiation) through questioning, tasks, expectations and feedback so that learning matches prior attainment more consistently across the school. This will be monitored through the Quality Assurance process, work scrutinies, new lesson feedback documentation and it will be a focus of the appraisal cycle for 2018-19. The consultants who have been working with us in the core subjects will also make this a feature of their development work. Differentiation will also be the focus of staff CPD and Middle Leadership development work.
- As stated above there has been a focus on questioning and students' oral reasoning which Inspectors commented on. Students in Year 7 come to us with their best piece of writing so that we can see what they are capable of when they start and the new demands of extended writing at GCSE are evident throughout the year groups – even year 7 use GCSE question stems. We now need to be more explicit in our development of literacy and particularly with extended writing. In the week beginning February 5th we will also be conducting a work scrutiny of random students in Years 8 and 10 to look at teacher expectations of them across a range of subjects. This will further help us to identify good practice and challenge any areas where expectations may not be as high.
- We will continue to share good practice in school through INSET days, weekly Teaching & Learning briefings, Faculty briefings and Faculty development time on Tuesday evenings. This has been very much a feature of school over the past 18 months and staff are very willing to share ideas, strategies and experiences with one another. We are all learners and can never say there is no room for further improvement no matter how well we achieve.

I do hope this update provides you with the reassurance that we have not been complacent and that we are all committed as a staff to achieving the very best for every student at Carr Hill. Future updates will not be as long but will hopefully be a means of reassuring you as parents and carers.

Yours faithfully



Andrew Waller
Headteacher